



2011 MICHIGAN DEER HUNTING PROSPECTS

THE STATEWIDE FORECAST

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Statewide

Over the last few years, around 700,000 individuals have purchased a license to hunt deer in Michigan. These hunters ultimately spend more than 9.6 million days afield and take more than 400,000 deer. Over 300,000 hunters participate in Michigan's archery season, about 600,000 hunt with a firearm and 200,000 with a muzzleloader. While the number of firearm season hunters often rises and falls as the traditional November 15th opening day rotates through days of the week, expanded youth hunting programs and crossbow hunting opportunities have increased participation among other segments of the hunting population. Although surveys show that the leading reasons many participate in deer hunting is simply the opportunity to spend time outdoors with friends and family, many hunters prepare each season to give themselves the best chance to see and take deer.

Deer are not evenly distributed across the state. There are considerable differences in habitat and deer numbers across Michigan's three regions - the Upper Peninsula (UP), northern Lower Peninsula (NLP), and southern Lower Peninsula (SLP). In addition to this regional variability, every year hunters only a few miles apart have very different experiences observing and harvesting deer. Across the state, reports on the soft mast crop are generally positive, with particularly good production of apples. The hard mast crop has shown low production overall, though some scattered areas have noted fair amounts of acorns and beechnuts. Maps and computer-based tools are increasingly available to narrow in on the best locations to focus scouting efforts, including the Mi-HUNT interactive web application available at www.michigan.gov/mihunt. While these and other resources are a great benefit for hunters, there is no substitute for personally scouting areas in advance of a hunting trip.

Part of hunting preparations each year includes becoming familiar with the most recent regulations. The deer website of the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and a new collaborative website with the Department of Fisheries and Wildlife at Michigan State University provide highlights of regulations changes, information about deer management, and links to additional resources, such as a list of deer check stations. These sites are located at www.michigan.gov/deer and <http://deer.fw.msu.edu>. Please refer to the 2011 Hunting and Trapping Digest and Antlerless Digest, available at DNR Operations Service Centers, license vendors, or available in electronic formats through links at these sites, for a map of all Deer Management Units and other regulations details.

The DNR also reminds hunters not to overlook the many other hunting and trapping seasons available in Michigan. These other seasons provide their own unique opportunities and can offer chances to scout or find potential new deer hunting locations. Explore your options at www.michigan.gov/hunting or www.michigan.gov/trapping. With preparation, attention to safety, and awareness of current hunting regulations, hunters can be ready to head into the field to enjoy the recreation opportunity offered by the 2011 Michigan deer season.

As an important reminder, those hunting within the UP and the multi-county Deer Management Unit (DMU) 487 in the tuberculosis (TB) zone must decide, before purchasing their deer license, if they wish the opportunity to take one or two antlered deer. Those desiring the opportunity to shoot two bucks must purchase a combination license. Both bucks have antler point restrictions. One buck must have one antler with at least 3 antler points; the other buck must have one antler with at least 4 antler points. Those choosing to purchase a firearm deer license and/or an archery deer license are limited to taking only one buck from within these areas during all seasons combined. Within most of the areas, a deer must have just one antler 3 or more inches in length, but point restrictions remain in place for some individual DMUs as well. These include DMU 117 (Drummond Island) and DMU 122 (primarily in southern Dickinson County, along the Wisconsin border) in the UP, and one small DMU (DMU135 in Iosco County) in the TB zone. In DMU 117, bucks must have at least one forked antler. In DMU 122 bucks must have at least one three-point antler. And in DMU 135, bucks must have at least one forked antler to be legal. Finally, within DMU 487 ONLY, hunters may harvest an antlerless deer with a firearm or combination license within the Nov. 15-30 firearm season or the Dec. 9-18 muzzleloader season.

Upper Peninsula

More than 100,000 hunters have pursued deer in the UP in recent years, including approximately 30,000 participants in the archery season, over 90,000 firearm hunters, and more than 20,000 hunters pursuing deer with a muzzleloader.

Within the UP, deer populations continue to slowly increase following a second mild winter in a row. Fawn production should be good, though predation may have produced some losses. Antlered buck numbers will likely be on the rise, as the increased production of fawns in 2010 should lead to greater antlered buck numbers this year. More deer will be found in the Southern UP near Lake Michigan, with fewer in the Northern UP near Lake Superior. Antlerless licenses are available in DMUs 022, 055, 122, 152, 155, 252, and 255 for 2011. Special buck harvest restrictions noted above are in place throughout the UP.

Northern Lower Peninsula

An average of about 285,000 hunters have pursued deer in the NLP over the last few years, including more than 115,000 participants in the archery season, an average of over 250,000 firearm hunters, and more than 50,000 hunters pursuing deer with a muzzleloader.

Baiting has been reinstated as legal for most of the NLP; however, baiting is still banned in DMU 487. Baiting may only occur from October 1 through January 1. Hunters are restricted to no more than 2 gallons of bait per hunting site; the bait must be spread over 100 square feet (equivalent to a 10 foot by 10 foot area).

Within the eastern portion of the NLP, TB prevalence continues to show a declining trend over the long-term, but no detectable change has occurred over the previous 5 years. Goals and hunting regulations in the eastern NLP are therefore driven more by the objective to continue to reduce TB

prevalence than by numbers of deer in this region. It is important for hunters to continue to observe the ban on baiting and feeding in DMU 487 and to harvest at least as many antlerless deer as bucks.

Mild winter conditions for the second year in a row in the NLP should lead to increasing deer numbers. Deer numbers on many state land areas appear to be on the rise, though they are still below goal in some areas. In some NLP units, indications are that there is an overabundance of deer on private land but lower than desired populations on public land. Special antlerless seasons and private land license quotas are used in these units to target deer on private land even if abundant sign and sightings do not occur on public land. The number of antlerless deer licenses is the same as last year in eastern NLP multi-unit area DMU 487, while no antlerless permits were made available in four counties (Cheboygan, Otsego, Roscommon, and Kalkaska). Special buck harvest restrictions noted above are in place in DMU 487. Within DMU 487 ONLY, hunters may harvest an antlerless deer with a firearm or combination license within the Nov. 15-30 firearm season or the Dec. 9-18 muzzleloader season.

Southern Lower Peninsula

An average of nearly 360,000 hunters have pursued deer in the SLP over the last few years, including more than 185,000 participants in the archery season, more than 290,000 firearm hunters, and an average of about 125,000 hunters pursuing deer with a muzzleloader.

Baiting has been reinstated as legal throughout the SLP. Baiting may only occur from October 1 through January 1. Hunters are restricted to no more than 2 gallons of bait per hunting site spread over 100 square feet (equivalent to a 10 foot by 10 foot area).

The deer population in southern Michigan is expected to be similar to the last few years. Abundant food and cover in the form of agricultural crops and scattered swamps and woodlots provide very good habitat across the southern Michigan landscape. This high quality habitat, combined with relatively mild winter conditions, results in an abundant and productive deer population. Deer populations generally exceed DNR goals and fawns generally come in sets of twins and triplets. High numbers of antlerless permits are available again this year, particularly in the multi-county DMU 486 (most of southern Michigan except St. Clair, Macomb, Wayne, and Monroe Counties).